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PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

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Be Wary of Charity Scams In Wake of National Tragedy

Francine Giani, Director of the Utah Division of Consumer Protection knows from past experience that it is not uncommon for the Division to receive calls from people who have been approached by a purported charity, raising funds for victims of the World Trade Center and of other tragedies. And, from past experience, she knows that many of these fund raising organizations could very well be bogus.

“With the media attention victims in New York, Washington, D.C. and Pennsylvania are receiving, and the immediacy of their situation we expect to hear about someone trying to capitalize on their plight and running a charity scam,” said Giani. “It happens virtually anytime there is a high visibility disaster of any kind. As public attention is raised, it becomes that much easier to try to scam someone.”

Giani urges people who want to contribute to relief efforts to do so through established charities already working to move much needed supplies to the East coast. She says the safest way to make sure a contribution is going toward helping victims is to contribute to organizations that are already established and who already have a network in place to deliver the aid.

“The logistics of getting aid into any disaster area are staggering,” she says. “The American Red Cross, who do emergency or humanitarian work regularly, know who they have to work with and what must be done to get supplies into those areas.”

The American Red Cross is providing lifesaving assistance in the form of immediate disaster relief and blood to victims and emergency workers in New York, Washington, D.C. and Pennsylvania following the incomprehensible attacks of September 11. The Red Cross has been on the scene from the beginning providing disaster support in the form of food, shelter and mental health counseling to all individuals affected.

The American Red Cross is accepting on line credit card contributions at www.redcross.org and Utah’s local Red Cross chapter can be reached at (801) 323-7000.

Giani says that even in a time of urgent need potential donors should heed a few tips on giving:

1. Watch out for organizations using copycat names or telephone solicitors with big emotional appeals. Exercise caution if someone going door-to-door and asking for donations approaches you.

2. Do your research. Before you part with any money, ask for written information and read it carefully. Check all the fine print and ask questions! Find out how your contribution will be used, how much of it will cover overhead costs, and if your donation is tax deductible.

3. Give money to organizations you know. Use caution with groups who come to you, especially with unfamiliar charities who call you on the phone and pressure you to give your credit card number or send cash.

4. Give when you are ready. Do not be swayed by emotional appeals.

5. Avoid cash donations. Cash donations are especially vulnerable to fraud, because they are virtually untraceable.

Giani also indicated that it is not uncommon for the Division to receive complaints about price gouging at the gasoline pumps during a National Tragedy. If consumers suspect price gouging, save your receipt and call the Federal Trade Commission at (415) 848-5182.